

Chapter 20

SIDNEY, B.C.

Two days before leaving Kitchener, I was sitting enjoying a cold drink with Uli, at the Cambridge base of YWAM. We were talking about the many good things the Lord had been doing in both of our lives. As we began to talk of future plans, I said,

"Uli, if you ever need a contact for YWAM on the west coast, don't hesitate to call me." Little did I realise how that simple invitation would impact our future.

They say that to be a true Canadian you must do two things; you must build your own home and you must travel across the country. I had not build my own home but had seen a church built. I think I must have handled every cement block and piece of lumber in that building, at one time or another! Now it was time to drive across most of Canada.

A large hire truck was filled with all our belongings, our car was attached by tow -bar, and we began the long journey. Driving more than five hundred miles each day, we arrived at Sidney on Vancouver Island, six days later.

We were warmly greeted by the small congregation and soon settled into the new work. Sidney Alliance Church was an offshoot of the church in Victoria, the capitol city of 'beautiful British Columbia'. The congregation was very caring, desiring to move in the freshness of what the Holy Spirit was doing in that area. They had taken a 'step of faith' in inviting a salaried pastor to oversee them, but it soon became evident that the financial base of the church would need to be enlarged if they were to meet their commitments. We all worked and prayed toward that end but, after three months I could see that we would soon be moving into a deficit situation. I considered applying for part-time teaching work so that my salary, though small, would not be a drain on the church.

It was a drizzling Sunday evening and I had a slight headache. Anne took the girls out to another church as we did not have an evening service of our own. I took a walk to spend some more time in prayer concerning our situation at the church. After twenty minutes I had arrived at the summit of Bear Hill, a favorite lookout spot. There was no one else within earshot as I cried out to the Lord for His guidance.

I am a cynic when people say "The Lord told me ...". I always want to ask them just how He spoke to them. It is particularly frustrating when they come to you for counsel only to preface their need by saying "The Lord told me ..." How dare I ever give counsel which might be contrary to what the Lord said? Of course, I do believe that the Lord does speak to us. The sheep are supposed to know His voice. However, many of the evidences of God's voice that people have responded to, give me much concern - and sometimes they are directly contrary to scripture. He does speak in many different ways. Bear Hill was one of the rare times when I heard Him speak in a clear, audible voice!

"Do not fear! I have brought you here and I will continue to do My will in you. You shall stay at the Sidney church until I call you on. You shall then pastor the Victoria Alliance church."

I was amazed! The voice was very clear and there could be no doubt of what was said. However, the immediate prospect of it coming about was very small. There were three pastors currently at the mother church in Victoria, and the senior man had only been there one year. Further, this was the capitol city church and I had only just been ordained and had never attended seminary. It would obviously be many years before I would be acceptable as pastor of that church. However, the voice had been very clear so I came down from that hilltop

with both excitement at having heard God's voice, and peace knowing I was to remain at Sidney Alliance Church while He would provide for our needs.

I told no one except Anne what had happened that evening on Bear Hill, but was not too surprised one month later, when news flashed around the city that the pastor of the Victoria Church had suddenly announced his resignation. His associate pastors had also resigned their positions and the District Superintendent was called in to assist the elders' board in finding another pastor. I am unaware of all that transpired over the next months but did wrestle with the temptation to shout out for all to hear that I was the man they were seeking! Instead, Anne and I stayed away from the church downtown so that we could never be tempted to manipulate the situation so that the elders might feel obligated to invite me to be their pastor.

Four months went by before I received the telephone call from our District Superintendent.

"Gareth, Victoria Alliance Church has asked me to invite you to become their pastor. Would you be interested in that position?"

He was surprised at the immediacy of my reply and even more so when I told him that I knew of this happening, several months earlier. I had heard the Lord speak but had not acted to try to bring it about. When He speaks, He is totally able to fulfill His words!

In September 1984 I was installed as pastor at Victoria Alliance Church, just one year after coming to their daughter church at Sidney. One must add here a warm commendation to the people at Sidney who became our biggest supporters over those years. Their disappointment was overcome by their love for us and the knowledge that the Lord was in this move. They are still among our closest friends and supporters these many years later.